

Opening Statement
The Honorable Frank D. Lucas, Chairman
Subcommittee on Conservation, Credit, Rural Development and Research

Hearing to review conservation issues

Wednesday, May 23rd, 2001
2:30 p.m.
1300 Longworth House Office Building

Welcome to the Subcommittee's first of three hearings to discuss conservation issues that must be addressed in the next farm bill. In our previous hearings, we heard and learned how efficient and conservation minded agricultural producers have become regarding energy. Agricultural producers are amazing caretakers of the land as they are the original conservationists. Since the land provides them with a living year after year, who has a more vested interest in taking care of it. I would dare to say no one.

This Subcommittee has been tasked with determining what conservation measures are needed in the next farm bill. We do not intend to take that responsibility lightly.

We have heard groups testify that between six and twelve billion dollars per year may be required for commodity programs to provide an adequate safety net to producers. We are also going to hear organizations request between three to eight billion dollars per year for conservation programs. It does not take an economics degree to see that the requests for these two farm bill titles alone add up to large amounts of money. Before we decide that money will solve our conservation concerns, we must diligently examine what we are doing now.

First, we must review the current programs. Are they meeting the goals they were intended to reach? Second, we must review the persons and organizations that are responsible for these programs. Are they administering the programs in an efficient and effective manner? Third, producers are faced with an array of regulations and conservation priorities. Do the current programs help producers comply with current regulations and will they help producers meet future regulatory burdens in order to allow U.S. producers to remain among the most environmentally friendly in the world?

Our Subcommittee Members will decide how dollars can best be spent on conservation; whether it is cost-share programs, technical assistance, watershed programs, or rental and easement programs or a combination of some or all of these is to be determined.

We will work with agricultural producer groups, sporting groups, conservation groups, agribusinesses, and other interested parties to find a consensus that is feasible and responsible.

Thank you for being here today, and I look forward to your testimony.